

# Participatory Action Research and Social Movements Methods, Approaches and Practices

Workshop



Department of Political and Social Sciences  
COSMOS - Center on Social Movement Studies  
Scuola Normale Superiore

Convener  
Alice Mattoni

Organizers  
Giada Bonu, Joana Hofstetter, Alice Mattoni, and Tobias Reinhardt

11 and 12 April 2019

## Programme

### 11 April 2019

9:30- 10:00

Registration and welcome address

10:00-12:30

Session 1

**Transforming Universities: Reflecting on the case of Dimmons, an action research group in the Open University of Catalonia**

**Instructor:** Mayo Fuster Morell, Open University of Catalonia

Mayo Fuster Morell will provide an overview of the stage of action research. She will point out to the diverse traditions and main current trends. Then, she will provide a framework of the transformative dimensions of action research at Universities institutional settings. She will present the case of Dimmons, an action research group in the Open University of Catalonia, and reflect on

the several challenges and opportunities, tensions and win wins encounter, and possible strategies to deal with them.

### Readings

- Fuster Morell, M. (2009). Action research: mapping the nexus of research and political action. *Interface. A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 1(1), 21–45.
- Dimmons.net Research Group. (2018). Strategic plan 2018-2023 – Action Research Group. Barcelona: Open University of Catalonia. Retrieved from <http://dimmons.net/strategic-plan-2018-2023/>

12:30-14:00

Lunch at Ristorante Olio, Via di Santo Spirito 4

14:00-16:30

Session 2

### Digital Media to Fight Marginalisation through Participatory Action Research

Instructor: Isabella Rega, Bournemouth University

In this session we will explore how Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be used as a research framework in the field of digital development: the use of digital media to fight marginalisation. The session will be based on examples from research projects conducted in Africa and Latin America. It will focus on ethical and methodological issues in using participatory action research in the field. In particular, we will explore how to include creative and visual methods in the PAR design and dissemination, and how to deal with ethical issues related to the researcher's identity and emotions and to the engagement of vulnerable groups. The aim is to use examples from past researches to foster interaction and discussion on how PAR can inform your own PhD study.

### Readings

- Doná, G. (2007). The Microphysics of Participation in Refugee Research. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2), 210-229.
- MacDonald, C. (2012). Understanding participatory action research: A qualitative research methodology option. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 13(2), 34-50.

19:00

Dinner at *Ristorante Cafaggi*, Via Guelfa, 35/red, 50129 Firenze FI

## 12 April 2019

10:00-13:00

Session 3

### Tools and reflections to enhance the practices of participatory action research

Instructor: **Margherita Mugnai**, Sociolab

In the evolving field of participatory action research (PAR), tools and methods to engage and empower local communities to be active agents of social change are rich and varied. Being PAR

an approach to research rather than a research methodology, experimentation and reflection in the context of participatory actions is key to assessing its potential. As practitioners working for over 10 years in the field of participatory processes, trainers and facilitators at Sociolab believe that the best way to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of PAR in the context of socio-political research, is through an experiential approach based on interactive sessions and horizontal exchange. In the context of the Doctoral Workshop on Participatory Action Research Methods, Sociolab will host a series of interactive sessions aimed at offering PhD candidates and other staff at SNS an opportunity to experiment and reflect on the involvement of different communities in research work, through: photolangage and visual storytelling; active listening and harvesting.

13:00-14:30

Lunch at Ristorante Olio, Via di Santo Spirito 4

14:30-18:00

Session 4

**Common discussion on participants perspectives and practices related to Participatory Action Research**

Moderator: Margherita Mugnai, Sociolab

## Instructors' short bios

**Mayo Fuster Morell** is the Dimmons director of research at the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute of the **Open University of Catalonia**. Additionally, she is faculty affiliated at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. In 2010, she concluded her PhD thesis at the European University Institute in Florence on the governance of common-based peer production, and has numerous publications in the field. She is the principal investigator at UOC for the European project *DECODE - Building the next generation of cooperative data platforms for digital sovereignty*, and *PLUS - Platform Labour in Urban Spaces: Fairness, Welfare, Development*. She is also responsible of the experts group BarCola on collaborative economy and commons production at the Barcelona City Council

**Margherita Mugnai** is a senior facilitator, trainer and participatory development expert at **Sociolab**, a multidisciplinary research centre in the fields of social science, participation, consensus building, conflict mediation, social and political research, training and communication. Sociolab works with and for a variety of actors in the public and in the private sector, as well as with civil society groups and organizations. She is responsible for the design and facilitation of participatory processes with public and private stakeholders and local communities to inform local development planning using facilitation techniques and approaches (Art of Hosting, open space technology, scenario building; European awareness scenario workshop, world café etc); community mapping, stakeholder mapping, SWOT analysis, and public consultations; as well as for designing and implementing capacity development and training programmes of local government officers, civil society organisations and International Institutions (The World Bank, UNDP) on participatory development and facilitation.

**Isabella Rega** holds a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and an Executive Master degree in Intercultural Communication from the Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI). Her PhD dissertation dealt with the role of telecentres in socio-economic development. She is currently Principal Academic in Digital Literacies and Education in the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University. She is also Deputy Head of CEMP – Centre of Excellence in Media Practice, Head of its Media and Digital Literacies Research Cluster and member of the Civic Media Hub. She has been involved in several Digital Development projects in Africa and Latin America, funded by a variety of bodies, such as the European Union, the Swiss National Science Research Foundation, the UK Arts and Humanities Council, and the Swiss Agency of International Cooperation. She co-founded Associazione seed, a non-profit organization based in Switzerland, promoting the use of educational technologies in the non-profit sector.

## Participants

### **Anastasia Barone**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

I am a first year PhD candidate in Sociology and Political Science. My project focuses on the spatial politics of migration, particularly on the alliances migrants build in different spatial contexts such as borders (transit contexts) or squats (permanent contexts). I'm also interested in intersectional approaches to solidarity and alliances. Although my project is still at a very early stage, I think the workshop could be extremely helpful both to address the issue of positionality in a similar research and to imagine how to develop a research design that could engage with participatory research action in the field of migration. Particularly, I think that the very issue of solidarity, both from the point of view of activists and from that of researchers, implies several reflections on the role of "allies", especially in order to detect (and deal with) unbalanced relations.

### **Angela Adami**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

I am a first year PhD student in Sociology and Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore. I hold a Master Degree in International Relations at Ca' Foscari University, where I specialized on Middle East and North Africa Region. My master thesis analysed the effects of EU Migration Policy on migrants' bodies at the Mediterranean border. My research interests include migrants' emotions and their impact on public spheres and political processes. I am also interested in gender studies and intersectionality. My research project revolves around two main thematic cores: the sociology of emotions and migration studies. I am currently working to shape the research design, deepening both theoretical assumptions and methodological issues. At this stage, it would be useful for me to understand what it implies, in terms of research design and preparation for the fieldwork, to engage with Participatory Action Research. Generally, I am interested in PAR workshop or both personal and professional reasons. I'm especially eager to address the question of research/activist's double identity and the use of visual methods – which I am considering to use – in PAR. Finally, during the fieldwork I might be spending some time with migrants' collectives and I think PAR would be particularly suited to avoid the risk of reproducing colonial practices and representations of migrants

### **Antje Scharenberg**

*PhD candidate, Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

I am a third-year PhD student in the Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. My ESRC-funded research project is tentatively entitled "Building Transeuropa - How transnational activists are redoing Europe from bottom-up". It is an ethnographic investigation of transnational activism, which seeks to develop European alternatives from below, at a time when the European project is facing an existential crisis and far-right nationalist forces are on the rise all across the European continent. Set up as an *engaged activist ethnography*, the project works in close collaboration with activists from two transnational civil society organizations (European Alternatives and the Young European Collective). My mode of participant observation is actively engaged in the activism at stake, meaning, for instance, regularly supporting the organisation of events, joining protests, or contributing in various ways to the development of publications and campaigns. Thus, my research seeks not only to contribute

to academic scholarship, but to also actively assist the search for transnational political alternatives - one of the urgent questions of the contemporary moment.

Due to the collaborative nature of my ethnographic project, I have an ongoing interest in epistemological and methodological questions regarding the meaning of doing research *with* and *for*, rather than merely *about* social movements. My own mode of practicing *engaged activist ethnography* is inspired by other (politically) engaged approaches such as PAR, and, in particular, by 'militant' forms of research (see for instance Juris, 2008; Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007; Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Throughout my field work, I have had to negotiate a number of challenges that come with such an engaged approach, including the dual loyalties of the activist-scholar, accompanying stress levels, challenges posed by the impact-driven neoliberal academy, exercises of collective reflection with activists, and questions raised about the process of knowledge production more broadly. Hence, having experienced such challenges throughout my own research, I strongly believe that there is a need for academic spaces that allow engaged researchers to collectively reflect on and find ways of addressing such challenges better. This is why I look forward to exchanging methodological experiences with other politically engaged researchers, and to learning more about how PAR techniques might be useful in thinking about and dealing with respective challenges.

### **Giada Bonu**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

I am a PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at the Scuola Normale Superiore and member of the Center of Social Movement Studies (COSMOS). I am currently working on a comparative research focused on the development of LGBTQI and feminist movements in urban areas through the production of safe spaces, both as emotional and physical spaces. I am specifically interested in how these spaces are imagined, produced and preserved, which boundaries crossed them, which relationship exists between the space and the city and more generally in developing the analytical framework of sexual democracy and intimate citizenship. I attained my B.A. in Political Science and my M.A. in Sociology at the University of Padua and then a Master in Political and Gender Studies in the University of Roma Tre. I am engaged in several networks and journals on feminist and gender studies and critical theory, such as DWF – Donna Woman Femme and Archivio Luciano Ferrari Bravo. I've also published papers on the divided memories of social movements in the seventies and feminist movements politics debate in Italy.

The framework of the empirical part of my research is the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR is a challenging option for everyone interested in studying marginal and non-hegemonic population, as in my case feminist and queer movements. As an approach to the empirical inquiry, it allows a "democratic, equitable, liberating and life-enhancing qualitative inquiry" (MacDonald 2012, 34) producing a shared knowledge on the topic between the researcher and the people researched. Involving a cyclic process of research PAR allows an extended focus on all the parts of the research, from the first observations to the dissemination of the results, always shared and co-constructed with the s/objects of the research. This approach stimulates a strong self-reflexivity of the researcher, confronting herself with the views, meanings and actions expresses by the subjects observed, but also being aware about her position in the field (as a researcher, as a woman, as a white and western and "able" person). Using PAR approach for the topic of my research is necessary for several reasons. First of all, I'm specifically interested in understanding the meaning and values produced by a certain community doing a

certain action. Then, because the communities analysed are queer and feminist communities, which daily experienced in the city and social relationship forms of marginalization, exclusion, danger. Confronting ourselves as researchers with marginal population means questioning our role, our views and our initial assumption trying to get in touch with perspective that, potentially, can be completely different from our convictions. For these reasons, PAR enables the free expression of all participants, taking into account the specific purpose of social justice. Thus, the research has in that specific context a social relevance and need to be conducted with this awareness.

### **Giulia Garofalo Geymonat**

*Assistant Professor in Sociology, Dpt. of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Senior Researcher Domequal ERC Project [www.domequal.eu](http://www.domequal.eu) Ca' Foscari University of Venice*

I am a sociologist in the fields of labour, gender, and sexuality, with an expertise in researching grassroots collective organising in relation to sensitive and stigmatised topics and identities. I joined Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and the ERC project "DomEQUAL. A global approach to paid domestic work and global inequalities" after working at Lund University as a Marie-Curie IEF Post-Doctoral Fellow and as a lecturer. My research focuses on social movements and intimate labour, especially in relation to issues of sex work, domestic work, migration/trafficking, and disabilities. I have a background in sociology (PhD, UEL), political economy (BA&MA, Bologna), gender and sexuality (MSc, LSE and Postgraduate Training, Utrecht).

I used participant methodologies in the following three research projects. Projects (2) and (3) involved social movements, in particular organisations promoting sexual assistance and organisations promoting sex workers' rights - both in Europe: **(1)** Research Project 'Access to Mental Health for People Who Sell Sex. A Participatory Study on Germany, Sweden, Italy and Britain'. [www.sexworkmentalhealth.org](http://www.sexworkmentalhealth.org) Principal Investigator along with Prof. Nick Mai (Kingston University) and Dr. PG Maciotti (Kingston University) Host: Hydra e.V Berlin. Funded by Open Society Foundations (2016-ongoing); **(2)** Post-doctoral Research Project: 'Sexual Assistance' A project on sex-related services for people with disabilities in Europe' 2012/2015 MARIE CURIE POST-DOCTORAL FELLOW, INTRA-MOB FP7, SWEDEN Gender Studies Dpt, Lund University (Supervisor: Prof. Jens Rydström); **(3)** PhD Dissertation: 'The Political Economy of Sex Work in Europe' Supervisors: Dr. Merl Storr (Anthropology), Prof. Massimo De Angelis (Political Economy) 2004/2010 School of Social Sciences, University of East London

Here are two of my publications sharing some of the participant methodologies used: (1) 2016 "Ambivalent Professionalisation and Autonomy in Workers' Collective Projects: The Cases of Sex Worker Peer Educators in Germany and Sexual Assistants in Switzerland" Sociological Research Online <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/21/4/10.html> (with P.G. Maciotti); (2) 2019 "Disability Rights Meet Sex Workers' Rights: the Making of Sexual Assistance in Europe" Sexuality Research and Social Policy <https://rdcu.be/bjHYG>

### **Joana Hofstetter**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

I am a PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at Scuola Normale Superiore, and a member of the Center on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS) and the Institute for Protest and Movement Studies Berlin (IPB). My research examines how sex workers in Europe currently

mobilize in relation to changed prostitution politics. I am particularly interested in the political agency and subjectivity of sex workers, the dynamics between repression and resistance, and the use of participatory and arts-based qualitative methods within social movement studies. I have attained a B.A. degree in Sociology (University of Freiburg) and a M.A. degree in Social Sciences (University of Freiburg, University of Cape Town, Chulalongkorn University Bangkok). I have worked on issues of global inequalities, knowledge production and feminist movements with various journals and research institutions. Since 2015, I have been involved with sex worker grassroots organizations in Europe and Asia, and have been associated with the German-speaking network on critical sex work research since 2016.

Within contemporary sex work research, participatory methods have been increasingly recommended and established as the way to go. On the one hand, the reasons for using PAR in research with marginalised populations are clear, as they aim at making the research process more equitable, reflective and empowering. Thus, even though I have not yet used PAR methods, I would like to incorporate them into my research design. On the other hand, as I am currently starting field work, I am also finding the actual practical implementation of PAR methods within a PhD programme highly challenging, especially due to constrained resources on my and the participants' side.

### **Sophia Wathne**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

Sophia Wathne is a first year PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at the Scuola Normale Superiore. Her research is on the global Food Sovereignty movement and how it can challenge common conceptions of sovereignty within political theory. Sophia attained her B.A. and M.A. in Political Science with a specialization in Political Theory at the University of Copenhagen. Sophia is a co-editor of the Danish feminist and decolonial journal *Marronage* and is a decolonial, feminist and environmental activist.

One of the stated goals of my research is to contribute to the decolonization of academia by giving voice to activists from the global south who are often overlooked. Therefore, I want to conduct participatory action research. Even though I have conducted field work in the past I do not have experience with PAR as I have stayed within neo-liberal academia's boundaries and tried to separate my roles as a researcher and as an activist. For this project I really want to change that.

### **Tobias Reinhardt**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

I am a second year PhD candidate in Political Science and Sociology at Scuola Normale Superiore, and a member of the Center on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS), the Institute for Protest and Movement Studies Berlin (IPB) as well as the Kurdish Studies Network. I am currently working on the Kurdish movement and its solidarity movement, with a particular focus on the solidarity building processes. Key issues are new internationalism, solidarity, coalition building and radical democracy. My methods previously included participatory mapping and participatory observation, but I had to reduce them due to repression problems in the field to semi-structured interviews. I received my BA in Social Sciences and MA in Social Sciences at the Humboldt University of Berlin, with a year abroad at the University of Gothenburg. I worked as a student assistant at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Women's and Gender Studies (ZIFG) in the program "genderDynamics:



Disciplinary Cultures and Research Organizations in Physics". During this time, I worked as well on racial profiling, decision making in social movements, and the Kurdish movement.

I have no previous experience in using participatory action research, yet I am currently trying to implement it in my field work. My previous approach was to use participatory mapping and to create a research group outside of the field. This first idea failed due to security concerns and therefore was replaced by a shifted focus. I am no longer trying to form an activist research collective, but I was asked by activists to transfer the interviews I have already conducted and which I will conduct into publicized interviews in order to create a mutual understanding between the groups in question. This might result in the jointly created book or brochure for the movements in different languages, which will deal with the history of the solidarity relation, the question what solidarity is in general, what it means in the context of internationalism between the global north and south as well as with concrete experiences and learning processes, especially in Germany.

### **Valerii Saenko**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

In 2017 I finished my master programme in Globalisation and Development. The programme looked at issues of development from social, economic and political perspectives. There I learned about perspectives of Global Value Chains, Global Ecological Issues, as well as Local Institutes and Poverty Reduction. During the programme I followed courses on qualitative research methods. The focus was on research design, sampling and conducting different interviews as well as making observations. After the master programme I conducted a field research in Tanzania on the topic of Contract Farming within an internship programme. During this fieldwork I faced a specific question from the interviewees regarding the research and how it will help them in the end. While I was prepared to answer in broad terms talking about the importance of academic inquiry and future impact on policy making, I still feel that this was not a sufficient reply. For this reason, I am very interested in following the PAR workshop in order to understand what immediate action a researcher can take within their fieldwork. Besides, I believe that participatory action research can also enrich my work by becoming more familiar with the invisible and often non-vocal aspects of the people's lives and the environment I will be studying.

Currently I am doing research on Corporate Social Responsibility and I plan on making a case study of relations by conducting ethnographic study of the relations between a sugar company Illovo and Tanzanian sugar cane farmers. This is a continuation of my fieldwork conducted after my master. The focus of this research is on power dynamics between actors in these relations. For this a more in-depth dive is needed. Since power is not always visible and cannot be easily quantified but at the same time it is always present and often dictates how people in certain circumstances act or react a more nuanced approach is needed for this research. The main goal for the fieldwork is to conduct detailed interviews with different sides of the relationships (i.e. farmers, the company, farmers' associations, local authorities). Nevertheless, I believe that a lot of the information can be missed out during the interviews since a lot of aspects can be taken for granted and never mentioned. Participatory action research would allow me to gain a deeper understanding of conditions of farmers, their associations, the company and its staff members. During the workshops I plan on learning the main aspects of PAR to be able to integrate them in

my own research and fieldwork. It might not be the main basis for my upcoming fieldwork, though I believe it will enrich the study and help me focus on the nuances of power relations.

### **Rossella Ciccia**

*Rossella Ciccia, lecturer in social policy at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast and Marie Curie Fellow at the Department of Social and Political Science at Scuola Normale Superiore.*

Rossella Ciccia holds a European PhD in Socio-Economic and Statistical Studies received in 2010 from La Sapienza University of Rome. Since 2016, she co-convenes the care section of the international research network Gender Equality Policy in Practice Network, GEPP. Her research aims to understand the production and relationship between inequalities in societies and how they are institutionalized in social policies across national contexts. Her research and publications develop around three main areas: 1) gender, care and family policies, their implementation and outcomes; 2) political economy of labour markets and workplaces; and 3) comparative methodologies. Her work has been published among other in *Journal of European Social Policy*; *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender*; *State & Society*; *Politics and Gender*; *Quality & Quantity*, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, and has recently co-edited a volume on the "The Changing Worlds and Workplaces of Capitalism" (2015, Palgrave).

I have no previous experience of using participatory action research, but I am interested in using this method in relation to two research areas I am currently working in: 1) implementation research, i.e. how people experience and use policies and how policy practices modifies their equality outcomes; 2) combining the perspectives of formal and informal caregivers with that of recipients of care policies (often vulnerable groups such as children, disabled and older people) in the analysis of social policies. My aim in participating in the workshop is to reflect on the potential of using PAR to investigate these research topics.

### **S. Derin Atışkan**

*PhD candidate, Department of Social and Political Sciences, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy*

Having completed BA in Political Science at Galatasaray University, Istanbul and MA in International Relations at Koç University, Istanbul; I decided to work more on peace and gender studies and became a member of the joint PhD Program in Transnational Governance between SNS and Sant'Anna di Pisa. Thus, my interest primarily in peace studies stems from the influence I had from reading Johan Galtung's research on negative and positive peace. Beyond, my reflections of the integration of human society, suggest gender equality as a crucial dimension and its lack as a major obstacle against human development.

I believe the global public policy networks such as EU and UN and their projects are keys to having positive peace in the world order. While creating their projects and programs, the global public policy networks inevitably have an aim of spreading some universal values, norms and policies. Apparently, the process of successful internalization of these diffused global public policies becomes a real necessity to obtain a sustainable positive peace. Therefore, in my PhD research I will work mainly on the individual and local implementation of these global norms and policies. More specifically I try to analyze the institutionalization process of these international norms (mainly the gender equality) in local contexts, especially in post-conflict countries.

My project that I described above requires a multi actor (state, non-state) and a multi level analysis (international, national, regional). For instance, international level analysis requires the analysis of policy commitments and ratification of these policies by different states, whereas the legal and institutional implementation of these norms and policies by the state level actors refers to the national level analysis.

However, local and individual level analyses will be the hardest parts of my work. For the local level analysis, I will try to analyze the dialogue and cooperation between the national and local level actors, and also the domestic groups' activities and projects. Individual level analysis is probably the most difficult part of this project and requires the analysis on the acceptance and internationalization of these norms and policies by individuals. That is why I would be happy to learn about as many methods as possible and make use of them in my research. Analyzing institutionalization process of the norms and policies requires also the agency-level analysis of this transformation. In order to achieve a successful institutionalization, these norms and policies should not only affect the understandings of these people, but also their behaviors and their real-life choices. In order to have a deepen analysis of these facts, PAR analysis that prioritizes the research 'with' people can be highly fruitful for my PhD research. Additionally, PAR research can be beneficial for me to analyze this process of social change for my country cases.

Even if I am not working on social movements, I will also try to elaborate on the effects of women's movements on the institutionalization process of the global public policy of gender equality in domestic contexts. All in all, I have never used PAR method before, but I believe that I can benefit from this workshop for my research prospects and I would be grateful to be able to participate to this workshop.